

# HEALTH CARE

*Federal health programs and agencies tangibly affect the lives and well being of every American. For example, coverage for health care services for the elderly and disabled is provided by Medicare; for low-income individuals, by Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); and for military members and their dependents, by Tricare. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) provide health care services directly to veterans and those in the armed services. In addition, public health agencies fund mental health and substance abuse services, conduct public health surveillance, foster biomedical research, and monitor the quality of medical products. The Health Care Team examines these federal health-related programs, policies, and agencies.*

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## DESCRIPTION OF

## our work

Much of our work concentrates on the ability of federal programs to provide access to quality care while paying appropriately for that care. We also examine the activities of federal public health agencies, including the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, among others. Our work at all the federal health agencies examines not only their achievement of program goals but also their management of information systems, human capital, and financial operations.

Our work typically focuses on the following topics:

- reforms, financing, and operations associated with Medicare, Medicaid, SCHIP, and the VA and DOD health systems;
- trends and issues in private insurance coverage, including those related to the uninsured population;
- the effectiveness of public health programs; and
- formulas for allocating grants to states and localities.

## HEALTH CARE

### IMPACT OF

### *our work*

As the Congress seeks to develop health care legislation to meet new challenges and improve existing programs, committees of jurisdiction have increasingly asked GAO to provide analyses of health care issues and federal health programs — often requesting a report or testimony in a matter of days. To that end, we play a major role in providing the program-specific information and analyses needed to make key policy decisions. For example, congressional requests for information resulted in recent GAO products on such headline topics as Medicare financing reforms, design options for a Medicare prescription drug benefit, adverse events from drug interactions, the West Nile virus outbreak, oversight of nursing home care, national preparedness for bioterrorist attacks, and improving patient safety and research on humans at VA.

Our work also includes identifying program integrity issues — systemic problems of waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement — and making recommendations for corrective action. Our reports and recommendations on administering the anti-fraud-and-abuse activities of Medicare and Tricare led to major changes in the federal oversight of the programs' respective bill-paying contractors. We were also at the forefront of reporting on state Medicaid financing schemes that have cost the federal government billions of dollars in inappropriate payments.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT and *future projects*

### *Health System Restructuring*

- Medicare financing and comprehensive structural reform
- Medicare prescription drug benefit options
- VA and DOD health resources realignment and rightsizing

### *Payment and Pricing of Health Services*

- Medicare's prospective payment systems for post-acute care
- Refinements of physicians' and other providers' payments

### *Public Health*

- Allocation of organs for transplantation
- Access to flu vaccine
- Tobacco sales to minors

### *Program Integrity and Management*

- Reducing improper payments in Medicare, Medicaid, and Tricare
- States' inappropriate practices to maximize federal Medicaid spending
- DOD and VA management and procurement of pharmaceuticals

### *Health Care Access, Quality, and Patient Protection*

- Nursing home quality of care
- Privacy of medical records
- Monitoring patient safety and quality of care
- Reasonable access to care for seriously disabled persons